

C. ALDRICH MOUNTAIN - 4,951 Acres
(RARE II No. 6233)

1. Description

a. History

This area was inventoried during the RARE II process. Under direction in the South Fork Planning Unit Final Environmental Impact Statement and the RARE II Final Environmental Impact Statement, it has been managed for nonwilderness uses.

b. Location and Access

Aldrich Mountain roadless area is located along the western edge of the Malheur National Forest, approximately 4 miles southeast of Dayville, Oregon, in Grant County. This area overlooks the John Day River and South Fork John Day River valleys. The area includes all or part of Sections 33, 34, and 35, T 13 S., R 27 E., and Sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 15, T 14 S., R. 27 E., of the Willamette Meridian.

Access is very limited. Primary access from John Day, Oregon, is by Forest road No. 2150, a minimally maintained, native-surface road. Secondary access is over a Primitive jeep track from U.S. Highway 26.

c. Geography and Topography

The terrain is extremely varied but primarily consists of steep and broken slopes on the west and south, and steep, bench slopes to the north. In addition, the area is highly dissected by minor streamcourses, including Aldrich, Flat, Smokey, Oliver, and Jackass Creeks. Dominant peaks are Aldrich and Little Aldrich Mountains. Relief is about 2,600 feet, from 6,950 feet below the crest of Aldrich Mountain to less than 4,350 feet on Aldrich Creek. See Figure C-2.

d. Geology and Soils

The geology consists of hard-rock formations covered with a thin mantle (typically less than 24 inches) of volcanic ash from historic Mountain Mazama (present day Crater Lake). The dominant hard-rock formations are from the Columbia River Group, which consists of hard basalt and andesite with soft to moderate hard tuffaceous interflows. An undefined pyroclastic bedrock occurs north of Aldrich Mountains.

The soils are predominantly (80 percent of the area) a silt loam textured volcanic ash over a gravelly to cobbly loam to clay loam subsoil. The other 20 percent of the area typically consists of a loam to gravelly loam over a gravelly to very gravelly loam to clay loam subsoil.

e. Vegetation

The Aldrich Mountain area is approximately 84 percent forested. Vegetation on the forested west- and south-facing slopes is predominantly ponderosa pine with Douglas-fir and white fir understories. The ground cover includes elk sedge, pinegrass, and wheatgrass. The forested areas north of Aldrich Mountain are primarily white fir, Douglas-fir, western larch, and lodgepole pine, with a ground cover of huckleberry, pinegrass, and brome-grasses. The highest elevations are occupied by subalpine fir and/or alpine sage and other subalpine shrubs and grasses. The drier or nonforested sites on all aspects are vegetated with juniper, sagebrushes, mountain-mahogany, and some scattered ponderosa pine. Ground cover on these sites includes wheatgrasses, fescue, and bluegrass. This area has about 1,300 forested acres that meet the Pacific Northwest Region's definition of old growth.

f Current Uses Recreational use of this area is limited by difficult access and the rugged nature of the countryside. The primary use is big-game hunting. Other uses include hiking, horseback riding, camping, photography, game bird hunting, and sightseeing from Aldrich Mountain lookout. The proposed Pacific Crest-to-Desert Trail would pass along the southern boundary of this area. (See Table C-2 for current recreation use data.)

Wildlife in the area is highly varied from spring through fall. Mammals include Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer, mountain lion, bighorn sheep, and black bear, as well as voles, marmots, and chipmunks. The pine marten may be present in the old-growth forest on the north-facing slopes. Bird species are numerous and include songbirds, raptors, game birds such as the blue grouse and mountain quail, and possibly pileated woodpeckers. During winter, elk range on the lower slopes of the north and southwest portions of the area. Native rainbow trout occur in some portions of the streams within this area.

There is one grazing allotment in the area providing about 125 Animal Unit Months each year. Livestock use is limited due to the rugged terrain.

2. Wilderness Capability

a Manageability and Boundaries

The present boundary does not follow natural physical characteristics but is logical and easy to locate on the ground. The boundary on the east consists of two north-south roads, on the south, west, and north, the boundary is the Forest boundary. All within these limits is included except for Aldrich Mountain Lookout and its access road.

The area is marginal in size and only 4,900 acres meet wilderness criteria. The State of Oregon manages 200 acres of land which have received timber harvest activities. Additional area could be gained by including the north-south roads. There is some essentially unroaded Bureau of Land Management, administered land adjacent to this area. That area, on its own, is too small for consideration by the Bureau of Land Management, and it is not being considered here in conjunction with Aldrich Mountain area.

A large unroaded tract of land adjacent to and east of the Aldrich RARE II area, locally known as Aldrich Scarp, presents the opportunity to enlarge the manageable boundaries. The total unroaded area is approximately 10,000 acres in size. This additional unroaded tract lies on the north slope of the Aldrich range and is very similar in description to the RARE II Area.

b. Natural Integrity

Within the area, the natural integrity is extremely high. With the exception mentioned above, the area is essentially untouched by human activity. The major impacts have been livestock grazing, fire management, and the introduction of a bighorn sheep herd.

c Naturalness

The effects of grazing show the most impact on naturalness of the area. These impacts include livestock water ponds, salting areas, and cattle trails, all of which are clearly unnatural and evident in their immediate vicinity.

The effects of fire suppression are not noticeable to the average visitor. Under more natural conditions, low-intensity wildfires would have maintained a ponderosa pine understory in ponderosa pine stands instead of the continued growth of fir species.

d Opportunity for Solitude	The opportunity for solitude is excellent year-round. During hunting season use increases; however, the remoteness and rugged terrain maintain opportunities for solitude. Most of the area is physically very demanding and there are no developed recreation facilities.
e Primitive Recreation and Challenge	The small size of the area and intrusion of the Aldrich Mountain Lookout and access road limit the possibility of a Primitive recreation experience, unless combined with the area in the Aldrich Scarp or the adjacent Dry Cabin roadless area.
f. Special Features	<p>There is scenic variety in the area, ranging from forested benches to deep canyons with open slopes and forested bottoms. The current visual resource variety class for the entire area is "A," distinctive.</p> <p>There are two possible cultural resource sites within the area; one prehistoric and the other historic. There are no other identified sites, however, a traditional foraging area is adjacent to the area boundary. This indicates at least travel through, and possible use by, American Indians and Europeans. There are old mining and cabin sites in the general vicinity, but none are known to occur within this area.</p> <p>There are no known Threatened, Endangered, or Sensitive plant or animal species within this area.</p>
3. Availability for Wilderness	
a Resource Potentials	<p>The area currently provides roaded natural and semiprimitive nonmotorized recreation opportunities. (See Table C-3) This area has a recreation visitor day capability of 7,104. (See Table C-4)</p> <p>The area has no known locatable mineral potential and contains no mining claims. The U. S. Geological Survey indicates a potential for oil and gas in the western portion of the area but no potential for geothermal resources. There are currently oil and gas leases in this general area.</p> <p>There are about 2,495 acres of forested land tentatively suitable for timber management activity. These timber stands consist primarily of mixed conifer, multistoried stands. The overstories are about 105 to 180 years old with understories of 70 to 80 years. There is a current standing volume of 24.1 million board feet (4.2 million cubic feet). With the use of intensive timber management techniques, 120 thousand cubic feet (686 thousand board feet) would be contributed to the annual allowable sale quantity in the first decade. The long-term sustained yield capacity from this area would be 142 thousand cubic feet per year.</p>
b. Management Considerations	The Aldrich Mountain area is historically one of the hardest hit by lightning on the Bear Valley Ranger District each year. The hazard is high to very high. South- and west-slopes are dry with flashy fuels, while north faces have dense concentrations of heavy fuels, primarily rotten white fir. Lack of access currently requires that most fires in the area be reached by helicopter or smokejumper crews.

Insect damage from western spruce budworm is widespread north of Aldrich Mountain. At this time, tree mortality across the roadless area is considered insignificant. The species involved are Douglas-fir and white fir. White fir has a high incidence of root rot in larger (12 inches diameter breast height) sized trees. Indian paint fungus is present and known to exist in all size classes of white fir contributing to vast amounts of cull volume.

There are 200 acres of land managed by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife within the roadless area boundary. There are three long-term, special-use permits on Aldrich Mountain.

4. Wilderness Evaluation

The Strawberry Mountain Wilderness is 33 miles east of Aldrich Mountain, Monument Rock Wilderness is 65 miles east, North Fork John Day Wilderness is 60 miles northeast, and Black Canyon Wilderness is 8 miles west. The ecosystems represented in this roadless area are also represented in these wildernesses.

The closest major metropolitan centers are Portland, Oregon (260 miles northeast), and Boise, Idaho (200 miles east).

In the 1979 RARE II study, this area received 2,728 comments favoring wilderness designation, 26 favoring further planning, and 3,399 favoring nonwilderness management. In recent Forest planning public involvement activities, this area received a low level of comment. Of the comments received, 28 were in favor of nonwilderness management for every 1 favoring wilderness designation.

The primary reason favoring wilderness was wildlife habitat protection, particularly for bighorn sheep. It was also suggested that this area be included with adjacent State of Oregon and Bureau of Land Management lands, and with Shaketable and Dry Cabin roadless areas. The naturalness of the area and the recreation values also received comments.

The primary reasons opposing wilderness designation were the small size, the evidence of human activity, and a stated preference for roadless/wildlife management.

5. Environmental Consequences

Table C-6 displays the various management area assignments for this area by alternative.

a. Vegetation/Trees

It is expected that the merchantable timber volume will be harvested over time in Alternatives A, B-Modified, and NC. As this occurs, tree size, stand density, and composition will change to a managed forest appearance. Approximately 620 acres of designated old growth will be retained as such in alternatives A and B-Modified. Alternative NC retains approximately 290 acres of old growth. The actual acres affected by timber harvest would vary between these alternatives with the exception of 337 acres under Alternative I (these acres are within the manageable boundary of Dry Cabin). Harvests are not scheduled and trees should retain present characteristics and appearance barring outbreaks of disease, insects, or fire under Alternatives C-Modified, F, and I. It is expected the Douglas-fir and white fir understories on the predominantly ponderosa pine south slopes will continue to increase due to exclusion of natural wildfires.

Should Alternative A, B-Modified, or NC be selected, the north slopes consisting primarily of Douglas-fir, white fir, western larch, and lodgepole pine would be silviculturally treated by shelterwoods and clearcuts. Tree vigor and age-class distribution would be improved through stocking level control on most of the forested area.

b Vegetation/Grass
and Shrubs

In Alternatives A, B-Modified, and NC, forage for wildlife and livestock is expected to increase on forested areas where stocking level control is achieved. The native forage species of elk sedge, pinegrass, brome, and wheatgrass are expected to naturally increase in vigor and density as timber stands are opened by harvest activities. Seeding of introduced grass species will provide higher quality forage and change the composition of forage plants.

In Alternatives C-Modified, F, and I, forage production is expected to remain at present levels and may decrease as the tree canopy closes in.

c. Wilderness

Alternatives C-Modified, F, and I would preclude motorized vehicle use and timber harvest activities including construction of timber access roads. Future wilderness consideration would remain a possibility.

If Alternative A, B-Modified, or NC is selected, users would see motorized vehicles, timber harvest activities, and new timber access roads. The area would eventually have a managed forest appearance with human activities evident. Future wilderness consideration would be foregone by the end of the first decade.

d Recreation

The primary recreation use of big-game hunting would continue under all alternatives. Opportunity for a remote, nonmotorized hunting experience would decrease in Alternatives A, B-Modified, or NC, as additional access roads are constructed. Hunter success may increase due to reduced hiding cover in harvested areas and easier access. The recreation opportunity would be roaded modified with expectations of increased vehicle use.

In Alternatives C-Modified, F, and I, the recreation opportunity would be semiprimitive nonmotorized, and the user would experience more natural settings for recreational experiences. Eventually, more trails may be constructed to accommodate users, and the natural setting for the proposed Pacific Crest-to-Desert Trail would be maintained.

e Scenery

Scenic variety in the area, ranging from forested benches to deep canyons with open slopes and forested bottom lands, would be maintained under all alternatives. Viewers would see evidence of activities such as clearcuts and access roads in the forested areas should Alternative A, B-Modified, or NC be selected.

In Alternatives C-Modified, F, and I, the present scenery would be maintained and no significant changes are foreseen barring a major outbreak of insects, diseases, or wildfire.

f. Wildlife

Old-growth timber and snags would be available to nongame wildlife to a greater extent in Alternatives C-Modified, F, and I. Management standards would adequately protect key habitats for all wildlife under all alternatives. Approximately 620 acres of old growth in this area are designated in Alternatives A and B-Modified, to meet management requirements for pileated woodpecker and pine marten habitat. Alternative NC retains approximately 290 acres of designated old growth.

Elk winter range occurs in about 40 percent of the area. Removal of some hiding and thermal cover by harvest activities would, in turn, increase forage in Alternatives A, B-Modified, and NC. Timber harvest activities on north slopes would improve the cover/forage ratio by reducing the amount of overstory and understory, which would improve forage on deer and elk summer range. Wildlife snag levels would be maintained by Alternatives C-Modified, I, and NC, and would be reduced by Alternative B-Modified.

g Water, Riparian, Fisheries Due to the small amount of riparian and fisheries habitat in the area, there are no significant effects and/or differences between alternatives. Moreover, management standards will adequately protect streamside areas under all alternatives.

h Cultural Resources All alternatives are similar in effects on cultural resources. There is no discernible difference between alternatives when considering existing regulations, laws, and management standards. The treatment alternatives present the greatest risk of inadvertent damage to the resource. They also present the greatest opportunity for discovery and interpretation of cultural resources.

i Soils Alternatives A, B-Modified, and NC present the greatest risk of inadvertent damage to the soils as well as acceptable amounts of compaction as a result of harvest activities. All of the alternatives adequately protect the resource through application of management standards.

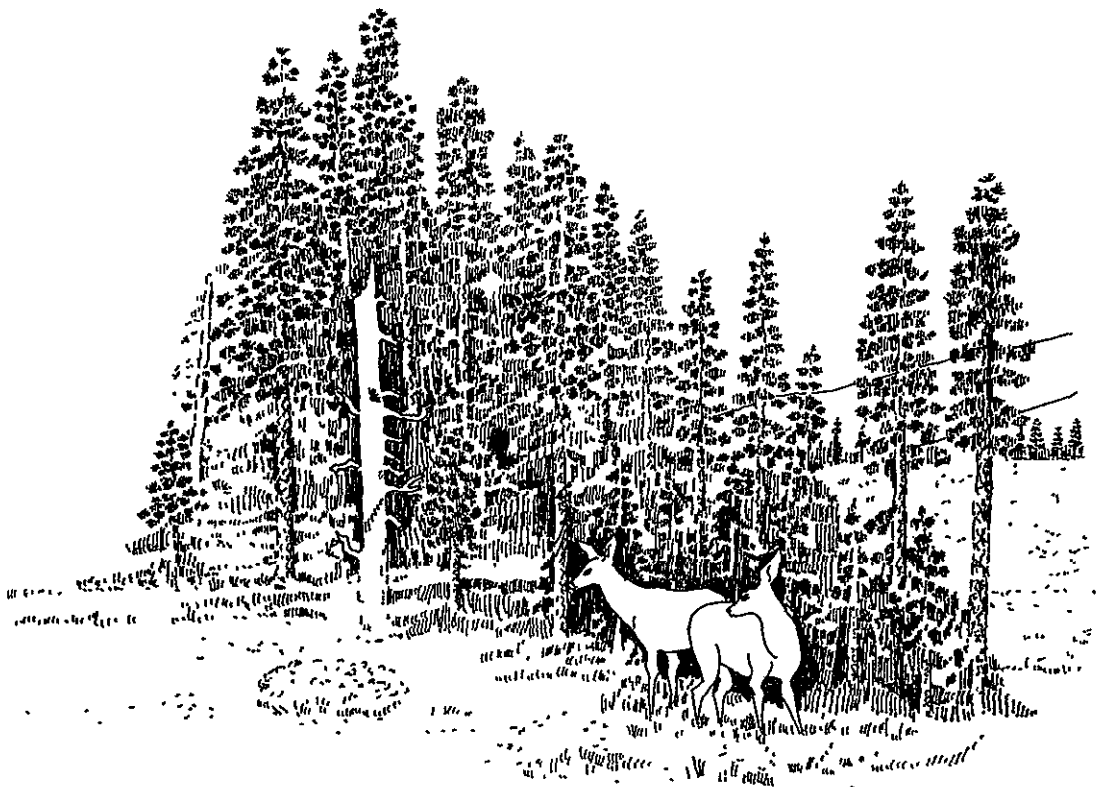


TABLE C-6
ALDRICH MOUNTAIN MANAGEMENT BY ALTERNATIVE
(Acres)

	Alternatives					
	NC ^{1/}	A	B-Mod	C-Mod	F	I-Preferred
1. General Forest	N/A	962	2,416			
2. Rangeland		585	607			
3. Riparian Areas		213	209			
4A. Big-Game Winter Range			710			
4B. Big-Game Winter Range Enhancement						
5. Bald Eagle Winter Roost						
6A. Strawberry Mt Wilderness						
6B. Monument Rock Wilderness						
6C. Pine Creek						
7. Scenic Area						
8. Special Interest Area						
9. Research Natural Area						
10. Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized				4,951	4,951	4,614
11. Semi-Primitive Motorized						
12. Developed Recreation						
13. Old Growth	N/A	620	620			
14. Visual Corridors						
15. Unit Plan Wildlife Emphasis Areas	N/A	2,166				
16. Minimum Level Management		405	389			
17. Byram Gulch Municipal Supply Watershed						
18. Long Creek Municipal Supply Watershed						
19. Administrative Sites						
20. Wildlife Emphasis Areas with Scheduled Harvest						337 ^{2/}
21. Wildlife Emphasis Area, Non-Scheduled Harvest						
22. Wild and Scenic River						
TOTAL ACRES	N/A	4,951	4,951	4,951	4,951	4,951

^{1/}The Timber Management Plan, upon which the No Change Alternative is based, was developed in 1979. The plan was not an integrated plan and, consequently, did not address all resource uses and outputs in an integrated manner. As a result, these acreages are not available.

^{2/}These acres are included in the manageable boundary of Dry Cabin roadless area.